

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

May 16, 2023

The Honorable Rita Bitter
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter,

Our constituents rely on the efficient and predictable provision of government services to make decisions and plan their lives. We know that the State Department can face unexpected challenges just like any large institution, but when those challenges persist, our constituents deserve explanations, communication, and recompense.

Last month, Secretary Antony Blinken testified before the House Appropriations Committee about the “dramatic” increase in passport requests, noting that the State Department is “*getting 500,000 applications a week for a passport. That’s 30 to 40% above last year.*”[1] Congressional offices subsequently have been experiencing an influx of constituent requests for assistance on passports, now consisting of a disproportionate percentage of our Office’s constituent services caseload. Moreover, although the State Department issued roughly 22 million passport applications last fiscal year, it is clear that applications this year are on pace to exceed that number by 18%--suggesting that currently extended wait times could continue to increase.[2]

These processing delays and subsequent influx of requests to Congressional offices cause added stress for our constituents around long-planned travel and sometimes require them to pay additional money for expedited processing and/or overnight shipping fees they otherwise would not have pursued. Meanwhile, Congressional offices are having to dedicate additional time and resources that could be devoted to other constituent service demands.

We understand that passport processing challenges have coincided with the beta-test rollout of the Online Passport Renewal (OPR) system. We applaud the State Department’s efforts to streamline and improve response timing for our constituents seeking to renew their passports online, but questions remain regarding how the OPR system has been implemented, how this system was communicated to our constituents, and the level of oversight it has received from the State Department.

Finally, we ask that the State Department improve its internal communications among passport agencies, as well as external communications to Congressional offices, and most importantly, to our constituents, about efficiently navigating passport processing challenges. Moreover, our constituents deserve clearer communication about current estimated turnaround times, both at the application stage and while their application is in process, if their estimated receipt time changes. In addition, our Congressional offices and our constituents need to receive the same information

and guidance about what services are and are not available. Congressional offices are repeatedly experiencing instances where our constituents report that State's Passport Offices gave constituents expectations of our Congressional Offices' ability to assist them that conflicted with the guidance that State has provided to our Offices, such as the timelines we must follow in order to submit appointment requests.

To help Congress understand the current passport delays, please provide answers to the following questions:

1. How many new passport applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?
2. How many passport renewal applications has the State Department received since January 1, 2023?
3. How many new passport applications has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?
4. How many passport renewals has the State Department processed since January 1, 2023?
5. How many new passport applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?
6. How many passport renewal applications are currently in the State Department's queue to be processed?
7. How is passport application workload distributed/assigned to different passport offices around the country?
8. How does State address errors made in its passport processing? For instance, when application materials are lost, constituents receive the wrong passport, or there are delays or lack of clarity in notifying applicants of errors in their applications?
9. How does State address instances in which it is unable to meet its predicted timeline to applicants, which may necessitate them to pay additional overnight shipping charges?
 - a. Would State consider issuing refunds to applicants who paid for expedited shipping but did not receive their passport within the promised timeline?
10. Has State created a process for assisting applicants if it loses the applicant's identifying documentation (birth certificates, naturalization certificates etc)? If not, why?
11. How was the option to opt-in to OPR presented to applicants?
 - a. Was it made clear that the system was in Beta-testing?

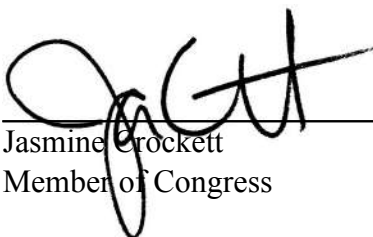
- b. Were the potential risks of opting-in to OPR, such as longer processing times, errors, or lack of access to human assistance, made clear to applicants?
12. Our offices have heard reports of OPR-related delays dating back to November, 2022.
- b. Does State have a procedure for manual human intervention in instances where errors with the automated OPR system resulted in longer processing times? If not, why?
 - c. Does State believe the OPR system would benefit from a manual intervention process in the case of persistent delays? If not, why? If so, has one been implemented? If not, why?
13. What are the metrics State is using to evaluate the performance of OPR? How is OPR performing on those metrics?
14. How does State currently view the future of OPR?
15. How has State decided what information to share with the general public about the passport delays?
16. Has State identified problems with how different Passport Offices share information about the status of an applicant's passport?
- a. If so, what is State's plan to improve coordination between Offices?
17. How has State developed its messaging to the public about what Congressional Offices can provide to their constituents in terms of passport services?
18. How is State prioritizing the scheduling of limited counter appointments at passport agencies across the country, including for life-or-death emergencies and Congressional requests?
- a. Do you have a plan to increase the number of available in-person appointments at Passport Offices in the future?
- 19: Please provide a timeline for the return of processing times to levels seen before the current spike in passport demand.
- 20: Please identify specific resources or support from Congress that will either alleviate the current backlog or prevent future backlogs.

We are grateful for your attention to these issues on behalf of our constituents.

Sincerely,



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress



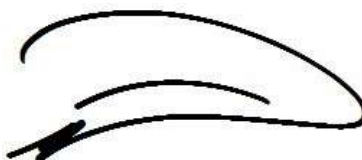
Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress



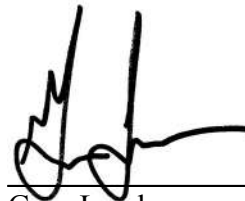
Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



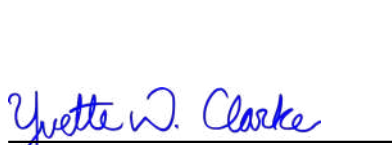
Patrick K. Ryan
Member of Congress





Scott DesJarlais, M.D.
Member of Congress

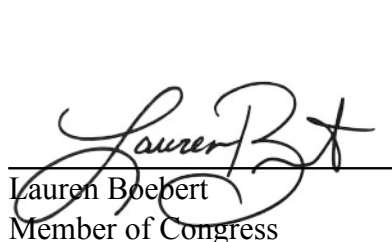



Greg Landsman
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

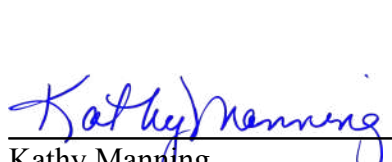

Pete Stauber
Member of Congress

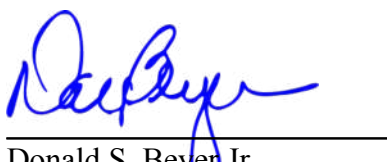

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

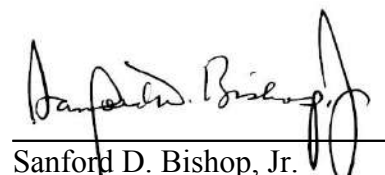

Kathy Manning
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



French Hill
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress


Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress


Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress


Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Member of Congress


Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress


Katie Porter
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Elise M. Stefanik
Member of Congress



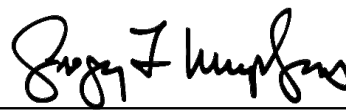
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress



Max L. Miller
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress



Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress



Ryan K. Zinke
Member of Congress



Laurel M. Lee
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress




Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Rich McCormick, MD, MBA
Member of Congress



Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress



Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Michael Guest
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



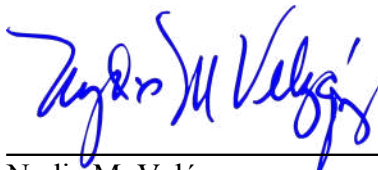
Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



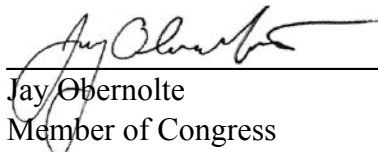
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



Jay Obernolte
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



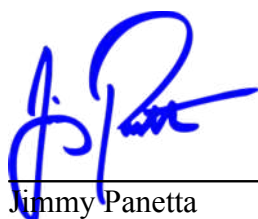
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



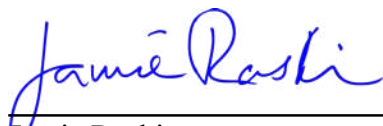
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress



Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



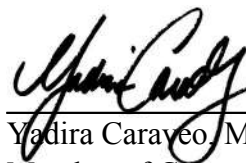
Ed Case
Member of Congress



Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Yadira Caraveo, M.D.
Member of Congress



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress



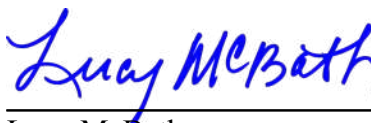
Julia Letlow
Member of Congress



Monica De La Cruz
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



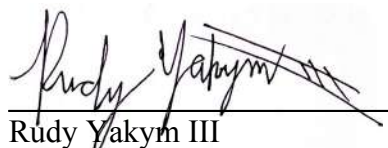
David J. Trone
Member of Congress



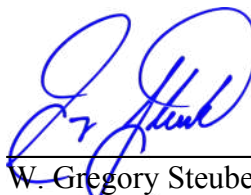
Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Lloyd Smucker
Member of Congress



Rudy Yakym III
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Josh Harder
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



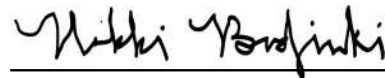
Angie Craig
Member of Congress



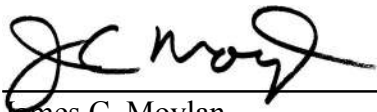
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



James C. Moylan
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Kevin Kiley
Member of Congress



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



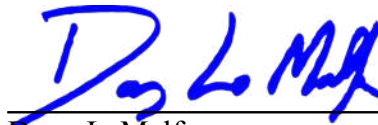
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Keith Self
Member of Congress



John R. Carter
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Sam Graves
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress



Charles J. "Chuck"
Fleischmann
Member of Congress



Brad Finstad
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



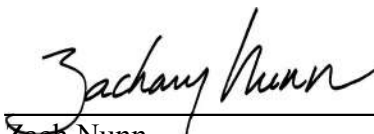
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Zach Nunn
Member of Congress



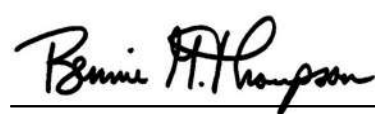
Dale W. Strong
Member of Congress



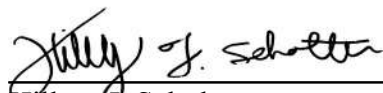
Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



Brandon Williams
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



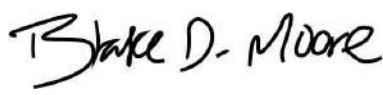
Hillary J. Scholten
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress



Blake D. Moore
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress



C. Scott Franklin
Member of Congress



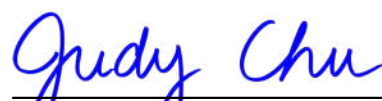
Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



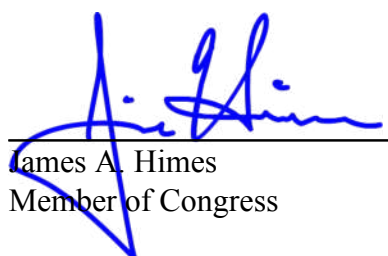
John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress



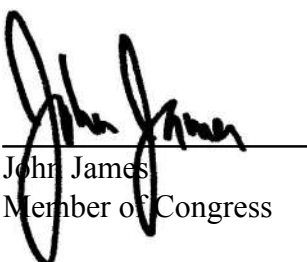
Juan Ciscomani
Member of Congress



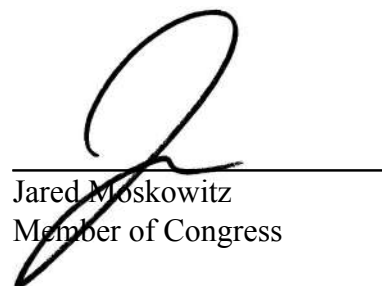
Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



James A. Himes
Member of Congress



John James
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress



Michael Cloud
Member of Congress



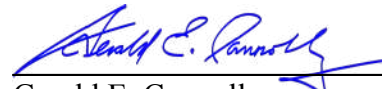
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



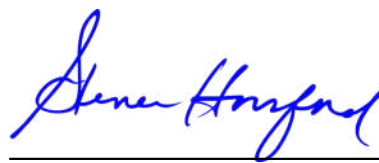
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Jefferson Van Drew
Member of Congress



Eric A. "Rick" Crawford
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



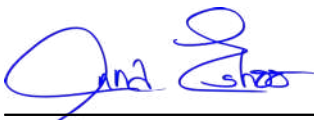
Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



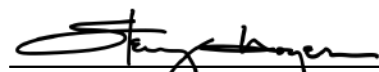
Marcus J. Molinaro
Member of Congress



Cory Mills
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



Mike Rogers
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



David Kustoff
Member of Congress



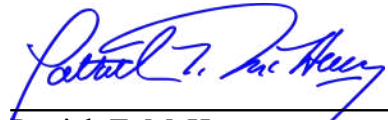
Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



William R. Timmons, IV
Member of Congress



Patrick T. McHenry
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Mark E. Amodei
Member of Congress



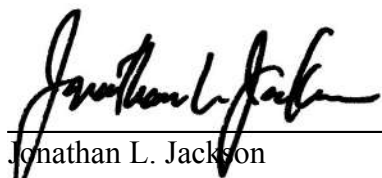
Chuck Edwards
Member of Congress



Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress



Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress



Brett Guthrie
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



Harriet M. Hageman
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress



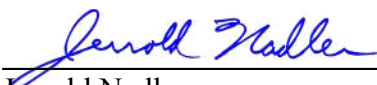
Summer Lee
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Terrold Nadler
Member of Congress



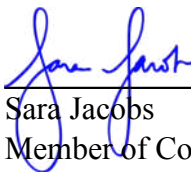
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



Ken Calvert
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress